Import of Wheat

327. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE & INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any decision to import wheat from other countries;

(b) if so, the details thereof alongwith the countries from which the imports have been planned;

(c) whether there is any shortage in the production of wheat in the country;

(d) if so, the details thereof and also the reasons for shortage in production; and

(e) the quality of wheat proposed to be imported alongwith the details of rate?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH): (a) to (e) It has been decided to import 5 lakhs metric tonnes of wheat through the State Trading Corporation (STC) at a price and quality as decided by Department of Food & Public Distribution. The wheat import is for Southern states only and the wheat is planned to arrive only in the Southern ports at Mangalore, Chennai, Tuticorin, Vishakhapatnam and Cochin.

The reasons and rationale behind importing the wheat are, *interalia*, reduced availability of wheat stocks in the Central Pool, high ruling market prices, higher offtake, lower procurement levels and to augment the domestic availability of wheat as the Government if firmly committed not to compromise in the matter of food security.

The STC has floated a global tender soliciting bids from prospective internationally reputed suppliers for this purpose.

As per reports received from the States, the area under wheat production this year is 265.47 lakh hectares as against 263.84 lakh hectares last year. Thus, there is likely to be an increase in wheat production this year as compared to last year provided weather conditions remain favourable.